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THE EQUIPMENT OF THE HIGH-SCHOOL PRINCIPAL¹

THE topic is one in which most of us are directly interested, and upon it all of us are likely to have definite views. The opportunities that it gives for cataloguing our virtues or dissecting our faults I shall hope to avoid, for the sake of limiting the discussion to a few points in the professional equipment of the high-school principal which seem to me to have become essential.

A few years ago any consideration of this subject as distinct from the general fundamentals of equipment requisite for all secondary teachers would have seemed academic rather than practical. Few will so regard it now. The march of events has raised our public high schools to a position of greater relative importance than ever before. Their growth in the last ten years is too well known to need description. In the north central states the enrollment in public secondary schools, in the year 1890-1, was a little over 104,000; in 1898-9 (the latest figures obtainable) it was as much over 242,000. In the same way the amount and character of the work done has been strengthened in the last decade. The change in the last thirty years has well-nigh amounted to a revolution, while the trend of progress seems to denote a farther advance.

The changes incident to this growth and improved organization have naturally brought to the principal increased labor, but they have enlarged his opportunity and his responsibility as well. The difference in degree is becoming a difference in kind, until to the native ability supposed to be found hitherto in public servants of this class there is now added a demand for professional training but lately unheard of. The post has become a professional one and the principals themselves should be the first to recognize the fact. To do so is not to magnify one's office—rather failure to do so means the acceptance of too low a standard.

The daily problems of the principal of a large school are, to

¹ A paper read before the Michigan Schoolmasters' Club, November 30, 1900.

some degree, comparable to those of the executives of the higher institutions; the difficulties in a small school are sometimes even more acute. In the high school the questions of the adjustment of work to the pupil, of the pupil to his work, and of different departments to each other, bring problems as perplexing and varied as those found at any stage of the pupil's advancement. These have lately been increased by the broadening of courses and the extension of the elective system. To meet them successfully a man must either have great ability, or a training that will equip average ability and judgment to do efficiently a highly organized work. Brains are fairly plentiful but talent is not sown broadcast. Brains, then, developed by good training, must always be depended upon to meet the requirements of this profession—as of all others.

This fact is not new or striking, but its immediate application seems not fully perceived except in the pedagogical departments of our universities. If it has reached the other departments it hardly influences their action. Hence it is generally unappreciated by candidates looking forward to this line of work and, quite naturally, by school boards in search of candidates—if they ever have to search for the omnipresent.

Under our present organization the principal is a specialist. But if I may start with a contradiction, that is just what he must not be, at least as the term is commonly used. The specializing that will best prepare him for work will include a training of executive power and of judicious sympathy; a study of at least two divisions of the educational field, the one in which he is to toil and the one just below; and as well the broadest possible scholarship. Captain John Bigelow, in his interesting book on the Santiago campaign, advocates a general staff which shall oversee and regulate the various war bureaus. This he claims is necessary if war scandals, such as lately disturbed and wearied us, are to be avoided in future; he describes the men required "specialists in specialties." The phrase may be transferred to the description of the high-school principal. The training that will secure this kind of equipment comes very near the old idea of general culture.

For many moons scholars have been arrayed under the two banners, classical and scientific. The field of knowledge has other divisions, but from the nature or the method of their work, most intellectual workers have been content to be placed in one of these classes. It is not necessary to recall the antagonism between them that has sometimes made them appear as hostile camps rather than as co-workers for righteousness. In the places where we ought to hope for broad sympathy with intellectual advancement, whatever the path, there has too often been unseemly quarreling over leadership and relative value. The effect on the schools has been bad, through false training of their managers-to-be. Too many college departments have been interested in securing (*i.e.*, in training) partisans rather than intellectual patriots. Having found a youth with interest and preference for their chosen line, they have tried to foster those qualities by the process of exclusion. Then they have been active, sometimes officious, in getting for this product a position to teach—which is all right, or quite as likely, a place as principal or superintendent, where he is expected not only to teach but to arrange his dominion, large or small, around the pivotal Latin or the pivotal science, as the case may be—which is all wrong. I think this tendency is not so marked now as it has been; nevertheless it is still too prevalent and influential. Its bad policy, from the college view-point, might be shown. Its effects on the schools are injustice and deformity.

Such a training may do (would it were more often supplemented) for the special teacher; it will not suffice for those who hope, as principals, to influence school policies or to direct the activity of a hundred or hundreds of children of many minds, different temperaments, and widely varied conditions of life. In the sense described, the high-school principal cannot afford to be, has no right to be, a specialist. He needs the broadest intellectual equipment he can secure, coupled with a working knowledge of scientific methods. I would not be misunderstood as in any sense undervaluing scholarship or even special proficiency in one field. A specialty—retaining the word's general usage—need not be in the principal's way; he may, if he is

strong enough, make it his most useful ally. But to meet his full opportunity he must be able to make it a point of departure rather than his center of energy, to use the precision and method gained from it for attacking other fields until he shall at least have surveyed their outlines and secured a point of view. Classical students, scientific students, students of history and literature, ought to make equally good principals, if of similar ability. But they must break away from traditional theories as to relative values, and so broaden their intellectual sympathy as to be able to appreciate the worth of all honest intellectual effort. If I mistake not it is toward this end that the best departments of pedagogy are now directing their training. Yet too often they seem to be striving single-handed against the current of influence in other departments. Practically the case reduces itself to this; he who is now preparing for the broader lines of teaching should look to the pedagogical department for inspiration and direction of work, to the others for all he can absorb during the years of his course.

There are, naturally, practical considerations that limit somewhat the relative value of the different lines of preparation. It is still usual for a principal to remain in charge of one department in addition to his general charge of the school. When this is so the conditions seem to me to put the heaviest handicap upon the scientist. Experimental work and preparations for it are heavy consumers of extra time. Regarding the inherent possibilities of producing power I believe, too, that the student of history and literature—whether the latter is ancient or modern, English or Greek—has the greatest advantage. These studies deal most directly with human nature as exhibited individually or in the mass. But that is beside the question. To make the first essential in the choice of a principal the fact that he is a classicist or a scientist is folly. Yet many boards still do this and are encouraged to do it. The prime requisite is scholarship vital enough to continue its growth; a scholarship that will not degenerate, that has not degenerated, into scholasticism.

Political conditions in Asia and Africa have developed in the

last few years certain nebulous governments called buffer states. Through these the European powers have tried to protect, by separation, their stronger spheres of influence. The principal's position as a harmonizer of different departments reminds one of these artificial political creations. But if schools lose equilibrium, the immediate disaster to students is greater than when colleges become lop-sided. Hence the principal must be actively a director as well as a buffer, and hence, again, we come to the necessity of broad preparation and a wide outlook.

The mass of executive work in our schools is growing yearly. Few outsiders realize its amount, though everyone admits the need of strong executive ability in the principal. Practically, I think, more can and should be done for training this power than has been hitherto. Some may object that executive ability comes by the grace of God—one has it or has it not, and training is superfluous. The same thing might be said of scholarship, but would hardly be accepted as an argument.

The need for a thorough study of education is just as clear. The opportunities to secure it are ample. One point only has to be emphasized. One who wishes now to do good work in a high school must give careful study to the grammar-school department. I venture to say that lack of accurate knowledge of the condition and character of the work of the grammar grades is the greatest fault of the present generation of high-school principals. The failure to coördinate the departments is shown by the proverbial gap between the grades and the high school, that chasm of discouragement and failure which swallows so many pupils. The fault does not lie wholly with the grades, any more than the blame for the former hiatus between school and college lay altogether upon the high school. For some years the high school and its problems have received the earnest attention of educational leaders, and particularly of college authorities. Those who have known most of our conditions have done us the most good. The far-away, censorious criticism of those who have not taken pains to observe has been alike futile and irritating. It is but repeating a commonplace to say that the present field for fruitful labor is in the grammar grades. The

bridging of the gap just mentioned rests as much with the high school as with those below. The principal's responsibility is established. The measure of success in his own department is likely soon to depend closely on his intelligent helpfulness in solving these grade problems. At present he is too apt to dismiss them as unimportant or beyond his sphere.

I have mentioned among the requisites of a principal a trained sympathy — trained sympathy because training gives control, and of all things he should avoid the unbalanced kind that ends in gush. In Elbert Hubbard's essay on Joseph Addison he gives the characteristics of a gentleman as sympathy, knowledge, and poise. "Poise," he goes on, "is the strength of body and the strength of mind to control your Sympathy and your Knowledge. Unless you control your emotions they run over and you stand in the slop." This sloppy kind too often stands in mind for all sympathy. It is certainly one of our great modern nuisances, and the average man of education needs no warning to shun it. The danger for those of our calling lies most often in the other direction. While it affects all teachers, its influence on the principal may be most harmful. Executive detail, steadfast application to intellectual work, beget interest in work or in a given subject for its own sake. They tend to exclude the living interest essential to success and preventive of fossilizing. The living and lively factors of our daily problem come to be simply factors. The specialist may forget that pupils, not studies, are to be taught; if the principal also disregards that fact the effect on the school is soon deadening.

The largest training of this power must come through experience. But experience, carelessly left to its own course, brings so many temptations to repress sympathy, so much devitalizing detail, that it seems to me the principal ought at the outset to put before himself the absolute necessity of retaining an interest in his pupils as reasonable human beings, and constantly correct his steps thereby. It is doubly hard from the fact that one must deal with immature minds, whose potential is easily obscured by present crudeness. But he who loses this sympathy has entered on the first stages of that creeping paralysis that

benumbs so many "old staggers." Sympathy is not all. Most emphatically the gospel of work is to be the salvation of our schools. But rightly interpreted that gospel lies in rousing the individual to stronger effort, by fitting work to immediate conditions. This can never be done unless quick, though well-poised, sympathy is added by those in charge to the careful study of conditions.

There is room in the principal's profession for the highest genius and virtue. Just as elsewhere, that room is oftenest unoccupied. But there is, and always has been, a supreme test of fitness—sincerity of character and purpose. Given that (and there is no cause to be ashamed of the way it has been met), it seems to me that any man may compel success, if he fairly views and tries to meet the professional requirements. These, I have aimed to show, demand culture, which Charles Dudley Warner has called "That rare product of scholarship and opportunity to which learning bears the same relation that mere manners do to the gentleman." They include trained administrative power, trained sympathy. As the field grows, and the demands of the principal's position increase, even genius and virtue will halt wearily unless strengthened by such equipment. With it the average man is ready to meet the daily broadening opportunity.

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